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Letters

Cryptographers Ready to Resist Smothering

To the Editor:

In your April 12 editorial "Smothered by a Security Blanket," you state that the small group of researchers working in the mathematics of codes and code-breaking agreed voluntarily to submit their articles for approval before publication.

This is not true for M.I.T. Laboratory for Computer Science researchers. We undertook, on our own initiative and three years before Admiral Inman's request, to send all cryptography-related articles to the National Security Agency at the same time we send them to colleagues for comment.

This M.I.T. policy, accepted by the N.S.A., differs significantly from the Inman request in that the write-ups are sent to inform the N.S.A. of our work rather than to obtain permission for publication. If the N.S.A. becomes concerned about our publishing such

material — and this has not happened with the 40 papers sent to date — it can join us in discussion toward informal resolution of the conflict. In the absence of such resolution we may resort to existing laws on classification or adjudication by the courts.

This apparently subtle difference is significant because it preserves the independence of the university in the pursuit of unclassified knowledge — an essential and proven balance for the well-being of our nation. This is particularly true in cryptography, which, besides being useful to governmental communications and intelligence, is also critical for protecting information in the rapidly evolving computer-communications environment.

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Cambridge, Mass., April 14, 1982